

STRENGTH AND KINDNESS

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP)



54 Beaconsfield Pde, Albert Park 3206
Ph: 96962107; barthur@basp.org.au
Website: www.BASP.org.au

*I was a stranger and you made
me welcome ...*

Newsletter 103 October 2021

The Project aims to:

- * provide hospitality and practical support for people seeking asylum
- * actively network with like-minded individuals and groups who are working for justice for asylum seekers
- * promote advocacy for the rights of asylum seekers
- * raise awareness of asylum seeker issues and concerns through a range of activities

A change in politics is preceded by a change in culture

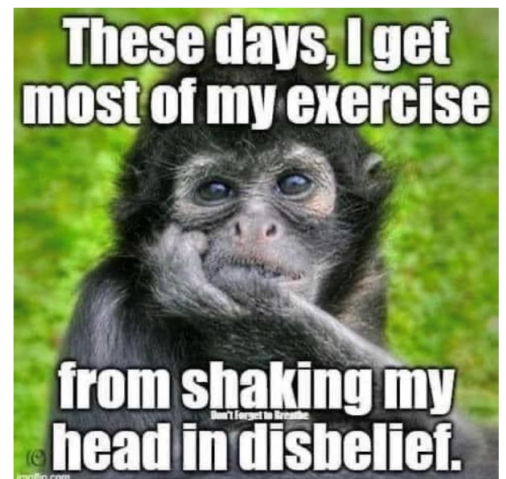
German poet Bertolt Brecht warned in his poem by that name 'Justice is the bread of the people'. He did not say justice depended on politics practised by the privileged. In another line he writes, 'Like the other bread, the bread of justice must be baked by the people... Plentiful, wholesome daily.' The practice of justice needs to be part of the culture of a people. This is the only antidote to political expediency and propaganda.

Culture is roughly 'the way we do things around here'. Or 'what we believe without much questioning.' So how do we change the culture of the Australian community with regards to asylum seekers?

How can we get enough people demanding an inclusive, kind and decent society so that there is an outcry of dissent when some of the least powerful people in our midst have no autonomy and are treated as 'expendables'? What would justice for people seeking asylum look like? A simple answer—almost the opposite to what we are meting out to people asking for protection now.

At BASP our answer to this question is at times a very positive response—we know so many people who want a more equitable world for refugees and asylum seekers. Not only that but they put a lot of energy, give a lot of financial support to achieving that world. At other times we feel less hopeful because so little changes—we feel almost guilty saying to those we work with 'Things will change. You will be able to reunite with your family, you will get released from detention, you will get the right to work, you will get enough income to provide reasonably for your family.'

When people say to us 'The problem is that there is not enough information about the way asylum seekers are treated' we wince a bit. We think there is so much information and in a readily accessible form. Maybe we need an about turn from the Murdoch press like the recent one on climate change!

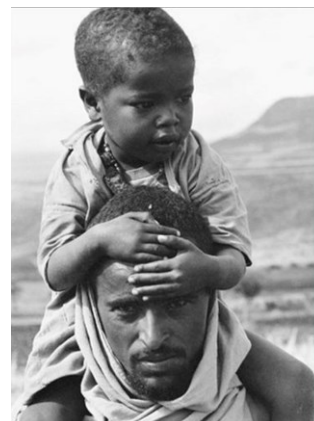


Donations to the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project are tax deductible

Over the past weeks many of us have watched and listened in horror as events unfolded in Afghanistan. Along with many others in Australia, we have people we have known now for years who are Afghan nationals. They have family and friends who are caught in unfathomable misery.

Part of this misery is of course the fear of the Taliban, particularly experienced by those who have had any connection with 'western countries'. Also targeted are minority groups and the main one of these are the Hasara people. However there are other small groups like the Uyghurs who are also very vulnerable.

Life continues to be very precarious in Afghanistan. The economy has ground to a halt. The World Food Program has estimated that already, 14 million people are food insecure: only 5% of Afghan families have enough to eat. UNICEF says 1 million children in Afghanistan are at risk of starvation and will suffer severe, acute malnutrition this year.



Another reality that makes the future totally uncertain is the fact that while Afghanistan has been taken over by the Taliban, the Islamic State (IS) extremist group and a collection of smaller foreign terrorist groups are still a threat.

The story of evacuation of Afghan people after mid August

After the traumatic 'fall' of Kabul in mid August, BASP has had a lot of contact with people who have families in very scary circumstances—most in Afghanistan but some who have fled some time in the past to Iran or Pakistan. We have, along with hundreds of others, lodged applications for visas for Australia in the hope that they would be successful in coming to this country. However, the Afghan people we know are terrified that their loved ones, whose lives are in danger in Afghanistan, will be rejected from Australia's special refugee visa allocation because the program has been overwhelmed by demand. Officials from the Department of Home Affairs have confirmed it has received 26,000 applications in just the past seven weeks from those seeking to get people out of Afghanistan. This means that more than 100,000 people have applied for the 3000 spots allocated so far in Australia's refugee intake of Afghans fleeing the Taliban takeover.

There are renewed calls for Australia to increase its Afghanistan refugee intake to 20,000, amid fears tens of thousands of Afghans at risk of persecution stand to be rejected. Many are pointing out that Canada has allocated 40,000 places for these refugees.

Who has been brought to Australia as part of the Humanitarian Program so far?

Amid chaotic and violent scenes, over 3000 people were evacuated from Kabul. These were:

- Australian citizens stranded in Afghanistan
- Former staff members at the Australian embassy. Afghan nationals who have worked for and with foreign governments are regarded as traitors by the Taliban, and are regular targets for insurgent violence, kidnappings and assassination. The embassy was closed in May because of fears of the fall of the national government.
- A number of sporting teams including seven female taekwondo athletes and members of Afghanistan's women's soccer team
- Eleven orphans
- Some judges (who were responsible for jail sentences for members of the Taliban who were released when the Taliban took over Kabul). The Taliban has targeted them for reprisal. BASP has been involved in one of these

cases—the outcome in this case remains tenuous.

- Interpreters, journalists and musicians

We understand that most of the people who were evacuated were from the Pastun and Tajik ethnic groups because these were the ones employed by the Aghan government.

Interestingly, the federal government says these Afghans who were evacuated out of Afghanistan with temporary visas amid the Taliban takeover, will be given a permanent protection. We are delighted that this is so but it is another case of a strange anomaly. The people who fled from Afghanistan because of the Taliban from 2013 to 2015 are still on temporary visas.

Who have not been brought?

The families of those (mostly) men who have been in Australia since 2011 onwards. Most of these arrived by boat, spent time in detention and are still on Temporary Protection visas and therefore have been unable to apply for family reunion prior to this. Our hearts go out to these men. They now have the added fear of the Taliban actively looking for families whose husbands have gone to other countries for asylum.

There are also many who worked with the Australian or Coalition personnel who did not get visas and are also in hiding. A family known to BASP for many years is trying to get visas for about 56 of these men with their families.

What is happening to those who are hiding and in fear (just three small vignettes). We have changed the names and some details

The following is a composite explanation of women's explanations of the need to escape: from Afghanistan to join a husband in Australia.

As a Hazara woman, I am part of a group persecuted by the Taliban because they follow a different form of Islam. I'm frightened that we will lose our freedom that women have gained for the last twenty years.

Now that they are in control I worry they will search for women to marry their fighters. I also worry there will be no food and freedom as the rest of the world abandons Afghanistan. I just want to feel safe, have freedom to live my life and be reunited with my husband in a safe country. My husband left Afghanistan 10 years ago, I feel alone and worry that I will never have children because time is passing. I fear going outside because the Taliban are everywhere with guns. They force us to wear burka and not allowing going outside the house without husband.

From a man who has a wife and five children in Kabul:

My wife and children cry all the time. My oldest daughter went to the door at night and the Taliban were there asking where her father was. They abused her and she needs medical help but they are too scared to go out. Even to get food they have to wait until someone in the street calls out 'food' and then they go and buy a little bread (maybe 20 Afghan). The food in the shops costs too much. I send money to the bank and they go to collect it but they are very frightened.

Neither my wife nor I have any other family. My sister's whole family was killed in a bomb blast. They are killing our people in the mosques. My daughter's friend was killed.

I only have one son. I think they will pick him up in the street if he is outside and make him go with them.

I sit on the bed at night and cry—I can't sleep. I just keep worrying about my family.

Mahamad gives the following information about his family:

My wife tried to get to Iran. I paid for a visa and she took that and she went with our baby son and a nephew who is 14. It is a long way to the border in Iran but she got some buses and walked for some distances. When she got to the border the Iranians said the visa was fake and they sent her back.

My wife is trying again to get a visa to go to Iran where she has an aunty. It is so hard to get a visa because the Iranian embassy is only open at times and they are only looking after official people. It is about \$350 (AUD) for each visa.

If they could get a flight to Herat they could get a bus to Mazar and a plane to Teheran (maybe).

I want to get my whole family to Iran because I think it will be safer. At present they are in Dasht-e-Barchi which is like Dandenong or Narre Warren in Kabul—most Hasaras live there or in a place on the other side of the city. I want to rescue my whole family. I will start with my wife and my son who is fifteen months, and my sister who is seventeen and my brother who is twenty. My sister passed her exams to go to university and then the Taliban changed the records and said she had failed. I am so sad for her.

I send money to Pakistan and they send it to Kabul. Food is very very expensive. A kg of lamb used to be 500 Afghan and now it is 800. Rent is not so bad because so many people have fled and there are a lot of empty houses.

Our family used to live in Ghazni province and they have talked about going back there to hide in the mountains but it is not safe to travel. At any rate the Taliban are there demanding money from the people who still live there. My cousin told me they came when they were not in control and got money saying that the money was for them to fight the national government. Now they are back getting more money. There has been a drought there for three years and people are starving so they can't give money even though they are being threatened.

The terrible irony of all this is that Mahamad fled Afghanistan originally because of problems with the Taliban and one consequence of that was that his six month old baby died as a result of Taliban actions then.

Where are those who were evacuated?

Of those evacuated, about 1800 are in Melbourne. The Government has contracted AMES as a Humanitarian Settlement Program provider, AMES to provide these refugees with accommodation and other necessities. Initially this was managing the quarantine process.

AMES is contracted to find permanent housing, get the children into schools, access health care and government services, connect with language tuition and education services and ultimately, once they are settled, to find employment.

A plea

There are 5100 Afghan refugees already in Australia on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and SHEVs. The majority of these are Hasara—the persecuted minority ethnic group. Most of those we know came in 2011-2013. Most are men who have their families still in Afghanistan or they have moved to Pakistan. One small thing our government could do would be to give permanent visas to these people. We plead **that the government provide a pathway to permanency for the 5,100 people from Afghanistan who remain on temporary protection visas in Australia, and prioritise family reunion for their families stuck in Afghanistan.**

Australia and off-shore detention

BASP argues strongly that asylum-seekers, no matter how they arrive in Australian territory, should have their claims for refugee status determined in Australia. It is the responsibility of the Australian Government to assess their cases guided by our international treaty obligations.

Since offshore processing began on 13 August 2012, the Australian Government has sent about 4,183 people to Nauru or Papua New Guinea. There are still 107 on Nauru and 120 in PNG. These asylum seekers were processed under Nauruan and PNG laws respectively. If they were rejected, UNHCR processed their claims. However, even if found to be refugees they do not have the right to come to Australia. Ironically, over 2000 of these are in fact in Australia, most as transitory persons via the Medivac legislation, or for medical reasons. These are all banned from settling in Australia.



End of processing claims for protection in PNG

Recently the Australian government announced that they were stopping the offshore processing of asylum seekers in PNG. Most of these are living in Port Moresby. Of these 74% have been found to be refugees.

So what will happen to the asylum seekers and refugees still in PNG?

The options for these refugee and asylum seeker men are poor: either to be sent to detention in Nauru, or to be resettled in PNG.

If the former, they are headed for a continuation of detention conditions, after already been living in detention and in limbo for over 9 years. If the latter, they will have all support and medical services withdrawn, and will have to find ways to support themselves. This will be like living in an open air prison.

Both options are not choices, even if presented as such by the Australian government.

Can't Australia just end its off-shore regime?

Of course. What Australia has done has been condemned by most countries in the world. It will always be seen as a dark shadow on our history. Thirteen people have died in offshore detention.

The desperation in the voice of a young Rohingya man who is in the Park Hotel having been in Manus and PNG for eight years is palpable. "We are forgotten. No-one tells us anything. I am just too tired." The good thing that has just happened to him is that his supporters have helped him celebrate his 25th birthday—he has been in detention since he was 17.



New Zealand offer

Year after year, New Zealand has offered to accept 150 refugees each year from PNG and Nauru. With a stroke of a pen Australia could have ended the misery of those marooned in both these off-shore places of detention. The official line is that this will be considered when the US 'deal' is completed. What is the logic behind this? **BASP advocates that the NZ offer be accepted and acted upon now.**

BASP witnesses Desperate Times for Many.

During this extended lockdown, we have been fortunate and grateful to have been able to meet the essential practical needs of many, thanks to our ongoing donations. BASP was supported by the Victorian Government through the Priority Response to Multicultural Communities during Coronavirus (PRMC) program. We have also had support from the Port Phillip food subsidy program.



Supported by the
City of Port Phillip

Government support for some asylum seekers

The State government extended its Covid support through the Extreme Hardship Support Program granting \$800 per person every 2 months. Red Cross administers this and has been inundated with requests. This program was extended beyond July, then October, but is now due to end at the end of the year. The State government also provided some rental support funds to a number of organisations, including BASP, helping asylum seekers for a few months. A few of those we assist were eligible for the Federal Government Disaster payment - for those who lost work due to the lockdown and could provide the relevant documentation.

In spite of some individuals getting this support, BASP has still spent \$80,000 each month paying for rent, bills, and day to day expenses.

Individuals are grateful

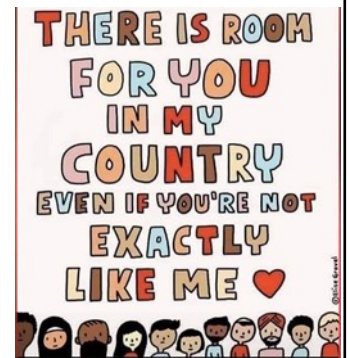
The relief to the individuals and families has been palpable. Such as:

"Hello. I hope you are doing well. I wanted to thank you for your time and for all your help. You made me feel relieved after a long time as I was always concerned and desperate how I can pay this bill off.

Me and my family are all so grateful for your help." And

'We really appreciate you help and support. We don't have enough words to say thank for all of you. We will pray for the effort that you have made to save my family and I.'

'My wish was to meet you today to present you my gratitude and thanks for your assistance, I wish you a long life and 100 more years in your life.' (Not sure either coordinator wants 100 more! But definitely appreciated his thoughts)



There are very limited options for rental support

There are limited housing supports for anyone in our community, especially for people seeking asylum, often with no ability or right to work and therefore unable to contribute to accommodation costs.

One single mother, with 2 sons with disabilities, lost her SRSS meagre benefits several months ago. Life Without Barriers was trying to have her benefits reinstated and BASP agreed to pay the rent for 3 months. The Department of Home Affairs refused the request for SRSS and the professionals working with the members of this family were desperate. BASP agreed to continue paying rent for some time to come. You can hear the relief from one of these workers: *"OMG! That is a fantastic news! You made me cry too! It took me a lot of courage to send you an email this afternoon as I thought that was too much to ask for* "

A young man with significant mental health issues was referred for housing. BASP had nothing suitable available for him which would adequately meet his complex needs. However, we agreed to fund 3 months accommodation costs if the case worker could find a suitable place which did meet his needs.

Her reply demonstrates how collectively, we can make a difference.

"I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the commitment, goodwill and dedication of all those who helped me find and fund a suitable accommodation for Mano, preventing him from becoming homeless at a time when his mental health deteriorated."

This is the result of many people working together as a team, including:

- *Dr. N, who suggested me to contact Brigidine ASP;*

- Sue, who invested her heart in finding Mano a safe place to live;
- Mira, who offered a more affordable rate due to Mano's circumstances;
- BASP, who ...(gave) approval to fund Mano's accommodation for, at least, the next three months.

Mano still has a long and difficult road ahead, but I truly believe that we have achieved something extraordinary here."

Stepping in at times makes a big difference

The BASP Coordinators will often talk with people who call to request BASP's services about other options, linking asylum seekers to other available and suitable services, where such exist. BASP still strives to fill gaps in services rather than duplicate.

We have been working with a family- 2 parents with health issues and 2 pre schoolers who moved into temporary accommodation. The mother was struggling with the constant demands of the kids, heightened by lockdown. They did not have the required Centrelink number to get free short term child care so important to keep this family afloat. A community member became aware of this, sought funds from the Hobsons Bay Refugee Network and this mum could book the kids into respite child care for a few days. *"Hello. I prayed a lot for you today. I was very happy, the child(ren) went to kindergarten. I was able to relax for myself. Thank you very much."* From us too - thanks to all concerned.

A community responds

We continue to receive offers of furniture and household goods but at present our storage areas for these are pretty full, so we are unable to accept all that is offered.

John (the volunteer profiled in this edition) and his helper, Sara, continue to help with collections, replacements, refurbishing and setting up new accommodation.

A few weeks ago, they set up a 2 bedroom unit in Dandenong which needed to be fully furnished and this was again done by them using donated goods from storage.

Recently a couple has made a one bedroom unit available in St Kilda and again this was fully furnished with the goods we have received.

The new occupant of this unit has been in a boarding house in the area, unable to work and with no benefits. He has a local volunteer and is supported by the regional mental health service. All were delighted by this opportunity being made available, feeling it will enhance his health issues and general wellbeing greatly.

How fortunate we are to get this support from people in the community.

Food donations

The food donations are always welcome (see back of the newsletter) and we thank all the groups who collect and bring these goodies in. We had a first time delivery from Sacred Heart Kew just beating the lockdown to bring in loads of goods which the school community had donated. – the photo opposite is teacher James Millane who had taught all day, mother Kate with grade 4 son Michael and Hani – one of the asylum seekers who helped unload the goods.

Sandy Balducci, the president of is Valguarnera Italian Social Club, also donated food collected by the club.



Many volunteers have continued to assist as best they can in lockdown. The food preparation and deliveries have continued uninterrupted, with the volunteers getting permits for essential work.

Another young asylum seeker says her volunteer, who lives locally, has been wonderful in meeting up for walks and bike riding, a skill she was taught by a neighbour of her BASP house.

Another volunteer agreed instantly to take on English conversation over Zoom with a single woman who knows all aspects of English need to improve for her to secure work post lockdown. This has been an instant success.

Remember the 'goodies' and the 'baddies' of folk stories?

One of the most common themes in folk tales and myths like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty is that of hospitality and welcome. Those who welcome the one who appears to be poor, disreputable, and a nobody, finds that they've entertained royalty or maybe one of the gods. As children, we probably cheered on the hero—as good confounded evil.

Life does not seem as simple as this now! In Australia, we have seen almost an art form of devising policies and regulations to ensure that the most vulnerable who come asking for protection are punished (seemingly forever). We have witnessed the slow normalisation of things that should not be seen as normal.

One cruel and heartless example of this is family reunion possibilities for refugees. Refugees on permanent visas can sponsor family members to come to Australia through the family stream of the Migration Program. However, current government policy makes it effectively impossible for refugees who came to Australia by boat to be reunited with their families.

This is because there is a particular regulation called **Ministerial Direction 80 (subsection 8(g))** which places visa applications for family members sponsored by refugees holding permanent protection visas who came by boat at the end of the queue, or as the 'lowest processing priority'. Visa applications sponsored by those who did not arrive by boat are automatically placed in front of those awaiting decisions. In practice, this means refugees who arrived in Australia by boat may never be able to reunite with their families as their visas may never be processed. This is despite paying the same significant application fee.

This is justified by the Australian authorities as a deterrent to anyone to come here by boat. The irony is that those affected are already here so they can't actually be persuaded not to come. It is an absolutely unnecessary measure because the Australian navy turns back any boats carrying asylum seekers and ensures they do not get to land on any Australian land.

We recommend that subsection 8(g) of Direction 80 be abolished so that all Australian permanent residents and citizens be allowed equal access to family reunion pathways.

Many families have already been separated for at least ten years. So we really mean that they will never be reunited? Often when we look into the eyes of those affected by this cruel policy, and see the hurt and confusion that is being done in our name and we want to weep.

Brigid received this recently:

From Shazia:

Hi Sister, how are you?

You might have forgot me, I was in mita.

Can you please run a campaign or a request or an appeal to minister to grant permanent residency to temporary protection visa holders as immigration is granting concession to international visa holders due to covid-19. It's good but first right is ours we are in Australia from last 8 years and participating in community by paying tax. I am working full-time but still have requirements in my 790 visa. Please prime minister grant us PR now, this pandemic and visa status put a lot of pressure and stress on us, we are suffering through a lot. I heard that in pandemic situations government facilitate community to prevent from stress but didn't think about us yet. 8 years punishment is enough, please be lenient to us, this is the right time to show your mercy. Please prime minister announce permanent residency for all temporary visa holders in Australia, it would be biggest favor forever.

Sister Please put such appeal for us. Only you can do something for us and it's a right time to do it. Please help. We will be grateful to you Sister.

Shazia this may be the best I can do. The combined voices of our BASP supporters may help! - Brigid



Project Officer

BASP has been fortunate to receive a grant from the Sisters of St John of God to fund a 3 year project officer to work on and enhance the BASP housing program.

BASP's work dovetails well with the Sisters of St John of God's mission and we were thrilled to receive this support.

We have appointed Andrea Fitzgerald to the role. She has experience working with people seeking asylum, in developing a housing program on the Thai Burmese border and recently worked with St V de P.

She will oversee the safety and maintenance of BASP's accommodation and work with the coordinators in assisting residents' participation in work, where feasible, and the community in general.

This funding complements the funding from the Brigidine sisters for Libby and Julie's roles, ensuring that all but a small amount of our donations are directed to people seeking asylum.

We thank the Sisters of St John of God most sincerely for their trust and support of our work and we welcome Andrea to BASP.



Vaccine Clinic.

Star Health has held vaccine clinics at BASP on Mondays for the past 6 weeks. This has been a wonderful initiative, ensuring that about 38 asylum seekers each week have received their 1st and 2nd doses of the vaccine. The medical team has enjoyed the contact with those coming in and the delicious lunches provided by Brigid in the main, with tasty additions from Julie.

The spin off benefit has also been that we have been able to see many of the asylum seekers in person, rather than via the phone as through lockdown.

Many thanks to the Star team for making this service available.

From the past

A short while ago Shahid came to Albert Park on a surprise visit. It had been some years since he had been in touch with BASP.

In 2001 Brigid met Shahid in the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre (MIDC). He was young and very anxious. Shahid was the first asylum seeker housed by BASP. This happened because he had come to Australia by plane as a student and was therefore regarded by Immigration as a 'legitimate' arrival even though he had applied for asylum here.



Taking advantage of a small window of opportunity, we discovered we could apply to pay a bond and have him released from detention pending his application being processed. The Brigidines had a house in Beaconsfield Pde which serendipitously was free at that time and it was agreed that Shahid could come and live there. (The house is still used for accommodating asylum seekers and is now a house for women).

Shahid studied at Homes Glen TAFE while living in Albert Park and subsequently worked in hospitality. Since then he has studied social work and now works for DHS.

Trudy—an amazing supporter of BASP—brought some laptops she prepared for giving to anyone needing one. They have been very useful especially for young people who have broken their laptops. The mother of one such young man who could not do his VCE work because his computer had died wrote *I don't now how can I say thank you so much I hope every time God help you and your family.*



The Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association (BRASA) held a raffle for BASP recently and raised \$2600. What an effort.

As well they invited Brigid to speak to the group about Afghanistan's situation. Thanks so much BRASA.

ONLINE RAFFLE

PICK FROM 3 EXCITING PRIZES!!

Tickets:
1 for \$3
5 for \$10

Prize A
Gourmet Hamper Value: \$100
Kindly donated by Robert and Gineette Preston

Prize B
\$100 Gift Voucher
Kindly donated by Bruno Lettieri

Prize C
Masterchef Stainless Steel Casserole with glass lid, 4.2 litre capacity Value \$100
Kindly donated by Margaret Nelson

email your ticket order to Robin robin.nelson@bigpond.com
Pay your money into BRASA account: BSB 633000 Acc. No. 15-4687498
Identify your payment with the prefix OnRaf2, followed by your surname

The proceeds of this raffle will support newly-released long-term detained refugees in Melbourne



BASP TRIVIA FUNDRAISER

FRIDAY 8TH. OCTOBER 7.30 TO 9.30 pm

The event was terrific. \$5900 was raised—and so for the two trivia nights this year this means \$10472. And we had fun!

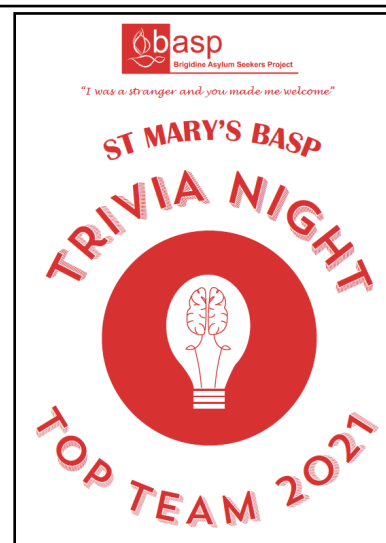
We wrote this to the Foxworthy family who 'managed' it all.

Last night was amazing. It was technically so perfect – but more importantly it all had such a good feeling of community.

I keep feeling things must get better when there are such good people doing their best for those who are suffering in 'no man's land' as many of our asylum seekers are.

You really are an amazing family! I must sit down with Ken and Colette and find out the ingredients to making such a troupe!

Thanks a million. You do our hearts good. Best wishes BASP



Every now and again we think—if this was the only thing we ever did at BASP it would be worth existing. Souleyman is a wonderful man who is stateless but lived in Saudi Arabia all his life. He married there, had three sons and his wife died. He remarried and has another child.

Souleyman sought protection in Australia and was granted refugee status some years ago. He has worked tirelessly—mainly in meatworks but always having a second job for weekends and holidays.

He has been trying to get his family to Australia ever since. He has had the help of Judy Dixon, a Migration Agent, who works tirelessly pro bono for BASP, and the number of set backs this man has had would fill a book. One day, we will tell the whole story.

The best news (almost too good to be true) is that his wife and youngest child should be arriving here next Thursday. The situation for the other three sons is tenuous but we live in hope that they will be soon able to join Souleyman too.

Sometimes a person we have known and helped for a long time chooses to return to their country—or they are deported there.

Nasser chose to leave and return to Pakistan. He was tired of the long wait for any recognition of refugee status. He has been in touch, sending a touching picture of a small piece of land—obviously recently cleared and dug. He explains that he is going to plant corn there and presumably sell it for income.

Nasser lived in the cottage provided to BASP by the Columban priests for a number of years.

He is more than sixty years old and his wife died while he was seeking asylum so life will not be easy for him. We wish him well.



Profiling volunteers (John was interviewed by the Chair of the BASP Board—Julie Francis)

John often takes a person seeking asylum with him on his trips, for help with lifting, but also to give people confidence on how to handle themselves in the Australian workforce. One of his helpers is now an Uber driver and has moved into his own flat. John feels that people's confidence grows when they get used to working with others in Australia.

John lives in Mordialloc and spends a couple of days a week driving around Melbourne to collect things and deliver, normally to the north and west of Melbourne - so he is running up quite a few kilometers. There are 3 garages used to store items in, if needed later. The work is consistent, as it's not just setting up new houses, but assisting those who move between houses, or coming back to a house if something has broken and needs replacement.

John says that all his experiences are good ones, but one of his favourites was delivering a swing set with 3 swings, to a family with an 8yo, 5yo and 3yo. The smiles on their faces was something he always remembers. Generally though, John says the furniture needs of BASP are quite basic - whitegoods, sofas, beds, coffee tables. No desks, shelves or sideboards, John says these often aren't needed or don't fit into a flat.

John's advice to anyone thinking of volunteering, is that it's a fantastic way of meeting people from different cultures and helping them to assimilate into an Australian way of life. He says the more people who can assist, the better. He points out that it's not about taking on a person and making them part of your family. There's value if volunteers can drop in occasionally, or take someone out somewhere different now and then. He says that people seeking asylum need others to guide them as they settle in, as a friend or a mentor. John reflects that there are many men with no work rights, they can't go back, but their future here is bleak, and they have nothing to do. They need things to look forward to, so John encourages anyone considering volunteering, to reach out to BASP and find out if they could help by visiting and mentoring someone.



Such generous fund raisers

On Brigidine day, Kilbreda College had a **Go the distance for Refugees** event and raised over \$11,000. They invited members of their school community to *walk in solidarity with the millions of forgotten men, women and children refugees and asylum seekers who are forced to leave loved ones behind and start new lives in strange environments.* The Go the Distance (minimum of 115 km) was designed to simulate the distance a refugee has travelled to reach safety from Damascus in Syria to Beirut in Lebanon. Those taking part could walk, run, cycle or even skateboard! How's that for inspiration!



Clonard College has also been engaged in a fundraiser for BASP over a month and a half.

St Bridget's Refugee Action Group (Greythorn) are raising money for two asylum seekers families who have no income. This small parish is a light house.

We are grateful for any of the following food (or vouchers to buy food and household necessities).



The following are still very much appreciated:

Sugar, cooking oil, Cans of fruit and tomatoes.

Herbs and spices

Blocks or individual wrapped cheese. Eggs. Peanut butter.

Long life milk, tea and coffee, cheese, **honey is a most appreciated food**, noodles, tuna, basmati rice, dates, jam

Gladwrap, tinfoil, pegs for hanging out washing,

Sweet and Savoury Biscuits, Snacks for school lunches (even when home!), Salt and pepper, Spices: coriander, cinnamon, ginger, Shampoo and Conditioner, Shaving Cream and shavers, Toothpaste and toothbrushes. Soap, deodorants

Garbage bags (small and large)



We seemingly never have enough washing powder, dish washing detergents and household cleaning products.

For anyone wishing to make a donation, the Project Bank details are: Brigantine Asylum Seekers Trust Account: bsb: 083-004; a/c: 56-924-6603; NAB.

Please put your name on the entry and please email us at contact@basp.org.au after making a donation so we can send you a tax deductible receipt. We will send a newsletter but feel free to tell us that you don't want one.



Many people have commented on how our experience of Coronavirus has given us a new perspective on many things.



A tiny microscopic virus that has had such profound effects on societies everywhere. It has taught us that our lifestyle, our freedom, our well-being cannot be taken for granted. What it has also demonstrated is that the pandemic has been much more disastrous for people who are impoverished, in nations where great inequality reigns and where the natural environment is most at risk. Many of those seeking asylum come from such places.

However, to inject into this dialogue some hope: BASP has had amazing support over the whole time of lockdown and Covid 19. We thank you all so much. Your financial support keeps us going—and so too do your messages of encouragement.

We wish you all well as we move into (hopefully) a new time in Australia—post Covid!

Brigid Arthur

Libby Saunders

(BASP Coordinators)